



Sabeel-Kairos UK Briefing Paper on Christian Zionism

What is Christian Zionism?

At its simplest, Christian Zionism is Christian support for Zionism. The driving principle of Christian Zionism is the belief that the secular State of Israel is a fulfilment of Biblical prophecy. Christian Zionism believes that this began when European Jews started moving to Palestine in the 1800s, and continued as Israel became a nation in 1948. Christian Zionists believe that modern Israel is a continuation of Biblical Israel and therefore should enjoy special privileges. They declare that it is the responsibility of Christians to support the State of Israel and its policies.

The Origins of Christian Zionism

The origins of the movement can be traced to the early 19th century when a group of eccentric British Christian leaders began to lobby for Jewish restoration to Palestine as a necessary precondition for the return of Christ. The movement gained traction from the middle of the 19th century when Palestine became strategic to competing British, French and German colonial interests in the Middle East. Proto-Christian Zionism therefore preceded Jewish Zionism by more than 50 years. Some of Theodore Herzl's strongest advocates were actually Christian clergy, like Revd William Hechler, the Anglican chaplain to the British Embassy in Vienna.

Christian Zionists are convinced that the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 and the capture of Jerusalem in 1967, together with the Sinai, Golan Heights and Palestinian West Bank, all in just six days, was the miraculous fulfilment of God's promises made to Abraham that he would establish Israel as a Jewish nation forever.

Burgeoning Christian Zionist organizations claim a support base in excess of 50 million supporters. This means there are now at least ten times as many Christian Zionists as Jewish Zionists.

The Political Agenda of Christian Zionism

The political agenda of Zionist Christians is multifaceted. It is shaped by an ultra-literal and fundamentalist theology.

1. The belief that the Jews remain God's chosen people leads Christian Zionists to seek to bless Israel in material ways. However, this also invariably results in the uncritical endorsement of and justification for Israel's racist and apartheid policies, in the media, among politicians and through solidarity tours to Israel.
2. As God's chosen people, the final restoration of the Jews to Israel is therefore actively encouraged. The emigration of Jews from Russia is funded and facilitated by Christian Zionist agencies in partnership with the Jewish Agency.



3. Eretz Israel, as delineated in the Hebrew scriptures, from the Nile to the Euphrates, belongs exclusively to the Jewish people, therefore the land must be annexed and colonised, Palestinians forcibly removed through home demolitions and land confiscation and the illegal Jewish settlements expanded and consolidated.
4. Jerusalem is regarded as the eternal and exclusive capital of the Jews, and cannot be shared with the Palestinians. Therefore, Christian Zionists lobbied the US Administration to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem, thereby ensuring that Jerusalem is recognised as the undivided capital of Israel.
5. Christian Zionists offer varying degrees of support for organisations such as the Jewish Temple Mount Faithful (TMF) who are committed to destroying the Dome of the Rock and rebuilding the Jewish Temple on the Haram Al-Sharif (Noble sanctuary of Al-Aqsa).
6. Christian Zionists invariably also have a pessimistic view of the future, convinced that there will be an apocalyptic war of Armageddon in the imminent future. They are critical of the role of the UN and oppose any peace negotiations that would require Israel to withdraw from territory occupied in 1967.

As a modern theological and political movement, Christian Zionism embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism. It has become deeply detrimental to a just peace between Palestine and Israel. It propagates a worldview in which the Christian message is reduced to an ideology of empire, colonialism and militarism. In its extreme form, it places an emphasis on apocalyptic events leading to the end of history rather than living Christ's love and justice today.

A Response from the Middle East Church

In 2006, the Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism was signed by four of the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem: His Beatitude Patriarch Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch, Jerusalem; Archbishop Swerios Malki Mourad, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem; Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal, Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East; and Bishop Munib Younan, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

“We categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as a false teaching that corrupts the biblical message of love, justice and reconciliation.

We further reject the contemporary alliance of Christian Zionist leaders and organisations with elements in the governments of Israel and the United States that are presently imposing their unilateral pre-emptive borders and domination over Palestine. This inevitably leads to unending cycles of violence that undermine the security of all peoples of the Middle East and the rest of world.



We reject the teachings of Christian Zionism that facilitate and support these policies as they advance racial exclusivity and perpetual war rather than the gospel of universal love, redemption and reconciliation taught by Jesus Christ. Rather than condemn the world to the doom of Armageddon we call upon everyone to liberate themselves from ideologies of militarism and occupation. Instead, let them pursue the healing of the nations!

We call upon Christians in Churches on every continent to pray for the Palestinian and Israeli people, both of whom are suffering as victims of occupation and militarism. These discriminative actions are turning Palestine into impoverished ghettos surrounded by exclusive Israeli settlements. The establishment of the illegal settlements and the construction of the Separation Wall on confiscated Palestinian land undermines the viability of a Palestinian state and peace and security in the entire region.”

The patriarchs concluded, “God demands that justice be done. No enduring peace, security or reconciliation is possible without the foundation of justice. The demands of justice will not disappear. The struggle for justice must be pursued diligently and persistently but non-violently.” The prophet Micah asks, “What does the Lord require of you, to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8).

Christian Zionism is now probably the largest, most controversial and destructive organised lobby within the Church today. It bears primary responsibility for perpetuating tensions in the Middle East, justifying Israel’s apartheid colonialist agenda, inciting military aggression against the surrounding nations and thwarting the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians.

Resources on Christian Zionism

Website

www.christianzionism.org

Articles

What is the Relationship between Israel and the Church? Seven Biblical Answers:
<http://www.stephensizer.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/7-Biblical-Answers-Israel-and-the-Church-2019.pdf>

Bible Study Resource: <http://www.stephensizer.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/WGOOS-Study-Guide.pdf>

Christian Zionism through Palestinian Eyes by Revd Dr Munther Isaac:
<https://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/resources/around-the-web/christian-zionism-through-palestinian-eyes>



Christian Zionism: Historical Roots <http://www.stephensizer.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/Christian-Zionism-Master-History-part-1.pdf>

Christian Zionism: Theological Basis <http://www.stephensizer.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/Christian-Zionism-Master-Theology-part-2.pdf>

Christian Zionism: Political Agenda <http://www.stephensizer.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/Christian-Zionism-Master-Politics-part-3.pdf>

Videos

What is Christian Zionism? Sabeel Kumi Now (2020) <https://youtu.be/a1aDnb8vEJE>

Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) USA Webinar on Christian Zionism (2021) <https://youtu.be/m1SUbmnZ7M>

With God on our Side: the film (2010) <https://youtu.be/NahTjAsDThs>

Books

Naim Ateek, Cedar Duaybis (eds) *Challenging Christian Zionism* (Melisende, 2005)

Naim Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (Orbis, 2008)

Gary Burge, *Whose Land, Whose Promise?* (Authentic, 2003)

Colin Chapman, *Christian Zionism and the Restoration of Israel* (Cascade, 2021)

Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?* (Lion, 2015)

David Crump, *Like Birds in a Cage* (Wipf & Stock, 2021)

Munther Isaac, *From Land to Lands, from Eden to the Renewed Earth: A Christ-Centred Biblical Theology of the Promised Land* (Langham, 2015)

Manfred Kohl & Munther Isaac (eds), *Christ at the Checkpoint: Blessed are the Peacemakers* (2018)

Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armageddon?* (Wipf & Stock, 2021)

Stephen Sizer, *Zion's Christian Soldier: The Bible, Israel and the Church* (Wipf & Stock, 2021)